

2300-451-3 - EMPLOYEE SUGGESTION PROGRAM

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1. Explanation of Material Transmitted: This chapter contains revised policies and procedures for processing employee suggestions.

2. Filing Instructions:

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PLEASE NOTE: For information on:

- o content of this chapter or to obtain specified forms, contact the issuing office listed above or the ICD Employee Suggestion Coordinator listed in the NIH Telephone and Service Directory yellow pages.
- o NIH Manual Mailing Keys or for a paper copy of this chapter, contact the Division of Support Services, ORS on 496-1787.
- o NIH Manual System, contact the Division of Management Policy, OA on 496-2832.
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- A. PURPOSE: This chapter describes the NIH Employee Suggestion

Program. As part of the HHS Incentive Awards Program, the NIH program aims to improve Government operations and services. Its purpose is to motivate employees to increase productivity and creativity by rewarding those whose accomplishments and adopted ideas benefit the Federal Government.

B. BACKGROUND AND REFERENCES

1. 5 U.S.C. 4501 et seq.
2. Federal Personnel Manual, Chapter 451.
3. HHS Personnel Manual Instruction 451-1, Incentive Awards.
4. NIH Manual 1130, Delegations of Authority, General Administration No. 3.

C. RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Director, NIH:
 - a. is responsible for the overall NIH Employee Suggestion Program.
 - b. has authority to approve cash awards in the amount of \$2,501 to \$3,500 and to recommend awards in amounts in excess of this level to higher authorities, such as the Assistant Secretary for Health.
2. Employee Suggestion Coordinator, Division of Management Policy (DMP):
 - a. manages and administers the NIH Employee Suggestion Program.
 - b. forwards suggestions that require evaluation by another component within or outside HHS, through appropriate channels.
3. Deputy Directors, Associate Directors and ICD Directors:
 - a. have delegated authority to approve cash awards up

to \$2,500 for adopted suggestions.

- b. appoint a Suggestion Coordinator to administer the program within the ICD.

4. NIH Supervisors:

- a. must be receptive to employee suggestions.
- b. do not have the authority to reject employee suggestions.
- c. evaluate the practicality and soundness of the ideas.
- d. assist employees in preparing suggestions by obtaining the suggestion forms, assisting in wording the suggestion, if the employee so requests, and forwarding the suggestion, with or without comment, to the ICD or NIH Employee Suggestion Coordinator, if requested.

5. Suggestion Coordinators:

- a. acknowledge each employee suggestion upon its receipt, assign a control number, and records the date and time the suggestion is received.
- b. review all suggestions received for evaluation and forward to the Employee Suggestion Coordinator of the evaluating organization.
- c. forward suggestions that require review outside of their organization to the NIH Employee Suggestion Coordinator in DMP.
- d. retain and dispose of employee suggestion program files (see Section K).
- e. prepare information for the Incentive Awards Program Annual Report.

6. Suggestion Evaluators:

- a. give due consideration to a suggestion.

- b. process suggestions which pertain to their functional areas in a fair and timely manner. HHS Personnel Manual Instruction 451-1 indicates that suggestions processed within the same organization should be completed within 30 days from date of receipt by the suggestion coordinator; within 60 days if the suggestion requires higher level consideration; and within 90 days if the suggestion requires consideration at the Department level or by other Federal agencies.
- c. decide whether or not to adopt a suggestion.
- d. consider granting an award for adopted suggestions.

7. Suggestors:

- a. submit suggestions using Form HHS 170, Employee Suggestion. The completed form must include the signature of the suggester and should indicate in item 9 if the suggester wishes to remain anonymous during the evaluation process.
- b. follow the procedures identified in NIH Manual 2300-451-3, Appendix 1, "Submitting Suggestions."

D. DEFINITION

Employee Suggestion: An employee suggestion is a constructive idea, written on Form HHS 170, Employee Suggestion (Appendix 2), and formally submitted by one or more employees, which directly contributes to economy or efficiency, or directly improves operations or services of the Federal Government. (Examples of types of suggestions excluded from the employee suggestion system are discussed in Appendix 1.) Employees who submit ideas that cannot be considered suggestions will be advised by memorandum that NIH is precluded from accepting these ideas but that their efforts to better our operations are appreciated and should continue.

E. ELIGIBILITY

All employees of NIH, except PHS Commissioned Corps Officers who have a separate program, are eligible to participate in

the suggestion program. Private citizens are also eligible for an award certificate and letter of thanks but cannot receive a cash award.

F. PROCEDURES

1. Individual Suggestions

The suggester prepares Form HHS-170, Employee Suggestion (Appendix 2) that describes a specific problem and offers a solution. In preparing suggestions, consideration should be given to the criteria identified in HHS Personnel Manual Instruction Exhibit 451-1-J (see Appendix 1). Benefits and/or savings should be shown, if known. Any available clarifying information (photos, drawings, stock numbers, etc.) should be attached.

The suggester should sign the form and submit an original to the supervisor, ICD Suggestion Coordinator or NIH Suggestion Coordinator. Supervisors do not have the authority to reject employee suggestions. This authority is reserved to suggestion coordinators and officials designated by the Director, NIH, to make suggestion awards. Suggesters should keep a copy of any suggestion submitted.

2. Group Suggestions

A group suggestion should be submitted using one completed Form 170, Employee Suggestion, designating "Group Suggestion" in item 1. In addition, each suggester should complete items 1-10 and 14-15 of a separate Form HHS 170, which will be retained by the suggestion coordinator. There is no limit on the number of co-suggesters who can be involved in the joint effort.

3. After-the-Fact Suggestions

After-the-fact suggestions are ideas that have been adopted informally or under some other program. They must be submitted in writing on a Form HHS 170, Employee Suggestion, within six months after the date of implementation. The suggestion should identify the person(s) to whom the proposal was made, the place,

approximate date, benefits, and circumstances so that a correlation between the suggestion and the implementation can be evaluated.

4. Receipt of an Employee Suggestion

The suggestion coordinator acknowledges each employee suggestion upon its receipt, assigns a control number, and records the date and time the suggestion is received. Next, the suggestion coordinator determines whether or not the suggestion meets the criteria identified in HHS Personnel Manual Instruction Exhibit 451-1-J (see Appendix 1). If these criteria are not met, the suggestion coordinator closes the suggestion and sends a memorandum explaining the action to the suggester. If these criteria are met, the suggestion coordinator forwards the suggestion for evaluation to the program official(s) responsible for the area that is the subject of the suggestion. A request for evaluation should include a copy of the evaluating suggestions contained in HHS Personnel Manual Instruction Exhibit 451-1-L (see Appendix 3); Form NIH-2696, Evaluation of Employee Suggestion (see Appendix 4); and the cash award schedules (see Appendix 5).

5. Disposition of an Employee Suggestion

The decision on whether a suggestion is adopted or not ultimately rests with the NIH official with delegated authority from the Director, NIH. In cases where the suggestion coordinator and the evaluator cannot agree on the implementation of a suggestion which affects the evaluator's operations, the matter should be taken to the official with suggestion award authority for resolution.

Upon receipt of a complete evaluation, the suggestion coordinator prepares a memorandum informing the suggester of the action being taken. When a suggestion is not recommended for adoption, the memorandum should clearly and tactfully state the reasons for non-adoption.

In all cases the suggester should be advised in writing of the disposition of the suggestion.

6. Cash Awards

A minimum cash award of \$100 is made for adopted suggestions that result in benefits to the Government (see Appendix 5). This minimum cash award may be granted for tangible benefits only when the benefits reach or exceed \$1,000. The minimum award for intangible benefits require a comparably high standard.

For accepted suggestions, the suggestion coordinator prepares a Form HHS 171, Recommendation for Cash Award, (see Appendix 6), and a Form PHS-4314-1, Certificate of Appreciation, (see Appendix 7). These forms are forwarded with a copy of the suggestion, all in duplicate, to the appropriate approving official. For awards that are not within the ICD delegation, the package is submitted to the NIH Employee Suggestion Coordinator where the package will be reviewed before being transmitted through channels to the appropriate office(s).

When the award is approved, the suggestion coordinator notifies the suggester and the supervisor that the award has been approved. For awards of \$100 or over, the suggestion coordinator notifies the NIH Record.

G. APPEALS

Employees may appeal the decisions concerning their suggestions, first to the ICD Suggestion Coordinator that advised them that the suggestion was not adopted; next to the NIH Employee Suggestion Coordinator; and finally, to the Associate Director for Administration, NIH. Appeals must be filed within two years of final action taken by a suggestion coordinator because files are destroyed, under GSA disposal rules, after two years.

H. PRESIDENTIAL AWARDS

Adopted suggestions that are beyond job requirements and result in first year measurable (tangible savings) benefits of \$10,000 or more are to be recommended to the OS for consideration for a Presidential Letter of Commendation. (See HHS Personnel Manual Instruction 451-1-100.)

I. REPORTS

Each year suggestion coordinators will prepare information for the Incentive Awards Program Annual Report, for submission by the NIH Suggestion Coordinator to OASH.

J. COPIES OF FORMS

For copies of the Form HHS 170, Employee Suggestion, or the Form NIH 2696, Evaluation of Employee Suggestion, contact the NIH Employee Suggestion Coordinator, Management Operations Branch, DMP, on 496-2832.

K. RECORDS RETENTION AND DISPOSAL

The records generated by the NIH Employee Suggestion Program are subject to access, release, amendment, etc., under provisions of the Privacy Act. Suggestion case files should be kept in locked cabinets or rooms when not in use. If transmitted to another office, for example, for evaluation, materials should be sent in an opaque envelope. Employee suggestion records are retained and disposed of under the authority of the NIH Manual 1743 "Keeping and Destroying Records," Appendix 1, "NIH Records control Schedule," Item 2300-450-1, which allows for records to be destroyed two years after approval or disapproval.

Guidance Based on
HHS Exhibit 451-1-J
Personnel Manual

A. To be eligible for consideration as a suggestion, an idea must:

1. Simplify or improve operations;
2. Speed up production;
3. Improve working conditions, procedures, operating methods or equipment;
4. Save materials/property;
5. Save manpower or money; or
6. Save energy (that results in tangible savings).

B. Ideas are not eligible to be considered as suggestions if they:

1. Call attention to the need for maintenance or repair work relating to buildings, grounds, or parking lots, such as painting, replacing, cleaning, etc.;
2. Relate to services or benefits to employees, such as vending machines, cafeteria services, restroom facilities, parking facilities;
3. Relate to normal safety practices, such as normal protective devices, removal of obstructions, installation of warning and traffic signs;
4. Are considered complaints;
5. Call attention to typographical or printing errors that normally would be corrected during scheduled review and do not cause misinterpretation or error;
6. Relate to stocking or re-stocking GSA Supply Store items listed in GSA Supply Catalogue;
7. Specify clarification of a manual or regulation;
or
8. Relate to cosmetic treatment, format, construction, color, or selection of equipment for new or existing forms or publications.

C. Suggestions must be submitted on Form HHS 170, Employee Suggestion, (Appendix 2). Suggesters must:

1. Describe a specific problem and offer a solution. Benefits and/or savings should be shown, if known. Attach all available information to clarify the proposal (sketches, photos, drawings, identification of specific buildings, stock numbers, etc.).
2. Sign the form to signify agreement that the United States may use their idea without incurring any

further claims by the suggesters or their heirs.

3. Note on the form (item 9) if they wish to remain anonymous.
4. For a group suggestion, submit one completed form, designating "Group Suggestion" in item 1. Each suggester should complete the top (items 1-10) and sign the back (items 14-15) of a separate Form HHS 170, Employee Suggestion, which will be retained by the suggestion coordinator. There is no limit on the number of co-suggesters who can be involved in the joint effort.

- D. After-the-fact suggestions are ideas that have been adopted informally or under some other program. They must be submitted in writing on a Form HHS 170, Employee Suggestion, within six months after the date of implementation.

The suggestion should identify the person(s) to whom the proposal was made, the place, approximate date, benefits, and circumstances so that a correlation between the suggestion and the implementation can be evaluated.

- E. The suggestion should be submitted through the immediate supervisor or may be submitted directly to the appropriate suggestion coordinator. Submission through the suggester's immediate supervisor is encouraged since advice may be provided that could improve the quality and scope of the suggestion.
- F. If a suggestion is not adopted, the suggester may request reconsideration if additional evidence is provided, such as new material/information, or if significant issues or questions are clarified. The reconsideration request may be submitted any time during the two year award entitlement period.

See paper copy for Appendix 2
Guidance Based on
HHS Exhibit 451-1-L
Personnel Manual

The office that has the primary responsibility for a specific operation, procedure, system or program must evaluate a suggestion based on its value and usefulness to the Government when the subject of the suggestion falls within the office's area of responsibility. The office will assign an evaluator at an appropriately responsible level within the organization.

A. The evaluator must:

1. Give due consideration to a suggestion;
2. Decide whether or not to adopt it; and
3. If the suggestion is adopted, consider granting an award.

B. In evaluating a suggestion and deciding whether or not to adopt it, the evaluator should:

1. Discuss it with the suggester if necessary to gain a clear understanding of the intent, etc.
2. Discuss with the suggestion coordinator any questions on the suggestion program (i.e., evaluation procedures, decision to adopt/not adopt, granting of an award, and amount of awards).
3. Complete a Form NIH 2696, Evaluation of Employee Suggestion (see Appendix 4). The explanation of the decision to adopt or not adopt should state specific reasons which may be passed verbatim to the suggester.
4. Promptly, objectively, and fairly consider the suggestion and not disapprove it solely because:
 - a. the suggestion is job-related. The evaluation must be confined to the merits of the suggestion.
 - b. an existing directive precludes the idea suggested. A directive may sometimes be

changed by a suggestion if it proves beneficial to the Government. If the proposal is contrary to law, regulation, Executive Order or similar requirement, identify the requirement.

- c. the suggested idea is already covered by an existing directive. The evaluator should consider adoption of the suggestion if adoption would cause implementation of a requirement which was previously unknown or which had not been put into use because of a misunderstanding or misinterpretation.
 - d. the idea is under prior management consideration or in use. The suggestion should be evaluated carefully to determine any correlation between the suggestion and the actions taken.
5. Check for duplication of another suggestion. An idea which duplicates one already under consideration may not be considered. An idea which duplicates one that was previously considered and not adopted may not be considered for two years after the date of final action on the first suggestion. (However, if the second suggester is responsible for the implementation of the previously not adopted suggestion, both the first and second suggesters should share in the award as merited.) If the second suggestion is similar to the first, but based on different conditions, it may be processed at any time and may be eligible for an award, if adopted.
6. Credit the suggester with a partial adoption if evaluation of the suggestion caused the development of a more feasible solution.
7. If the suggestion is adopted, state how it might be used elsewhere throughout the Government.

C. The evaluator should forward the completed evaluation report, along with the suggestion package, to the suggestion coordinator. If the suggestion is adopted, the evaluator should also arrange for preparation of

the award recommendation (see Appendices 6 and 7).

D. Suggestions should be referred by the appropriate suggestion coordinators as follows:

1. Suggestions that require evaluation by another part of HHS, or another Federal agency other than the one in which they originate should be forwarded by the originating suggestion coordinator to the NIH Suggestion Coordinator in the Management Operations Branch, DMP.
2. Suggestions that require Department level evaluation or evaluation by another Federal agency should be forwarded through appropriate channels to the Department Incentive Awards Office. If adoption of the suggestion will affect the operation of the originating organization in any way, an evaluation by the originating organization should be made before it is forwarded. If the originating organization has authority to implement at least part of the suggestion, the suggestion may be adopted and an award may be granted before forwarding to the Department for wider consideration.

E. Suggestions should be processed within the following time frames:

1. Suggestions processed within the same organization in which they originated should be completed within 30 days from the date of receipt by the suggestion coordinator; within 60 days if the suggestion requires higher level consideration; and within 90 days if the suggestion requires consideration at the Department level or other Federal agencies.
2. If a testing period is necessary before adoption is final, the evaluator shall notify the suggestion coordinator in writing, stating an estimated time frame for testing. The suggestion coordinator shall notify the suggester of this action.
3. If there are delays beyond the established time

frames, the evaluator should notify the suggestion coordinator.

- F. If a suggester requests reconsideration of a suggestion that was not adopted, the reevaluation should be made at the next level above where it was last evaluated.

See paper copy for remaining Appendices 4 through 7.